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Life or Death

“The Nazis victimized some people for what they did, some for what they refused to do, some for what they were, and some for the fact that they were.” John Conway speaks of the Holocaust in a moving way. In the twentieth century, the Jews were victimized and murdered on a massive scale. An effort is being made to not let anything like this happen in the twenty-first century. Death is a major theme that appears everywhere in *Night*, by Elie Wiesel. It also occurs in my second outside reading book, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, by John Boyne. In both of these books, sub themes arise like mass murder, death of identity, and death of loved ones. These books are both about the Holocaust too, so they have similar impacts on society and on the reader.

Death of identity is a theme that appears in *Night*, and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. Identity is lost in Night when the Jews are reduced to just numbers, no longer names. Elie recalls,

“In the afternoon we were made to line up. Three prisoners brought a table and some medical instruments. With the left sleeve rolled up, each person passed in front of the table. The three “veterans,” with needles in their hands, engraved a number on our left arms. I became A-7713. After that I had no other name” (39 Wiesel).

This shows that they are no longer cared about by the Germans. They think that since they go by just a number, that’s what they are. Shmuel also shows identity loss. He gets beaten by someone and just doesn’t care anymore. Shmuel loses his identity with this, “There was a lot of bruising on his face…‘Does it hurt?’ ‘I don’t feel it any more’” (Boyne 175). Both of these situations show the death of identity in both books. It is illustrated very well. It was also very common in the Holocaust and occurred with almost all of the Jews.

Additionally, another mutual theme is death of loved ones. Elie’s mother, youngest sister, and father all died in the concentration camps. Elie reminisces, “I awoke on January 29 at dawn. In my father’s place lay another invalid. They must have taken him away to the crematory. He may still have been breathing” (Wiesel 106). In this quote, Elie’s father died so they took him to the crematory. He was in horrible condition and was suffering with dysentery.” This quote shows the time when Elie remembers the night were his dad was sleeping in the same bunk, the next morning he wasn’t there. This was a tragic time for Elie because he realizes he lost his father. In *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, Bruno dies. He is the son of a German Officer that is in charge of Auschwitz. He doesn’t think anything bad when he kills Jews, when he finds out his own son died, he realizes what he is doing and how it is so wrong,

“There was nothing particularly special about this place, or different, but then he did a little exploration of his own and discovered that the base of the fence here was not properly attached to the ground as it was everywhere else and that, when he lifted, it left a gap large enough for a very small person (such as a little boy) to crawl underneath. He looked into the distance and followed it, through logically, step by step by step, and when he did he found that his legs seemed to stop working right – as if they couldn’t hold his body up any longer – and he ended up sitting on the ground in almost exactly the same position as Bruno had every afternoon for a year, although he didn’t cross his legs beneath him” (Wiesel 215-216).

Once Bruno’s father sees what it’s like to lose someone that you love and are close to, he is devastated and does not want to continue with his job. The rest of the family realized how horrible this was earlier and moved back home, the father did not though. Death of loved ones is recurring theme in both of these books.

Additionally, mass murder is another shared them between two great books. Mass murder was very common in every concentration camp. Both of these books take place in concentration camps as well. In *Night* we see many hangings and burnings in the crematories. Elie recalls as he is close to death,

“I bit my lips so that my father would not hear my teach chattering. Ten steps still. Eight. Seven. We march slowly on, as though following a hearse at our own funeral. Four steps more. Three steps. There it was now, right in front of us, the pit and its flames… No. Two steps from the pit we were ordered to turn to the left and made to go into a barracks” (Wiesel 31).

Elie was a couple feet away from losing his lives like many other Jews in the crematory. He was lucky at that point in time. There were serious punishments for disobeying orders. Sometimes you would get beaten, other times you would be hanged in front of the entire camps or thrown into the crematory with many other burning bodies. In *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, Jews were sent on marches then put into gas chambers were they all suffered a horrible death,

“Shmuel may well have opened his mouth to say something back, but Bruno never heard it because at that moment there was a loud gasp from all the marchers who had filled the room, as the door at the front was suddenly close and a loud metallic sound rang through from outside… And then the room went very dark and somehow, despite the chaos that followed” (Wiesel 213).

In this quote, many Jews were put into gas chambers and left to die. This is another example of mass murder among the Jews. They have really no defense and are helpless.

The Jews were manipulated by the Germans. They were put in many horrible conditions and many were killed off. Therefore, death is a very common theme amongst the Holocaust. *Night* and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* both share the theme of death. Mutual sub-themes are death of identity, death of loved ones, and mass murder. These books, being about the Holocaust carry many different emotions with them.